

PD & Depression and Anxiety

Living well with Parkinson disease (PD) can be challenging. For many years PD was thought to mainly affect just how people moved, we now know that many people with PD also experience depression and anxiety. In response to a PD diagnosis, you may feel depressed BUT changes in the brain of person with PD may also affect mood. Parkinson disease alters the levels of dopamine and other chemicals (neurotransmitters) in the brain. These changes can greatly affect your mood and how you feel. Depression and anxiety are medical conditions; they are not character flaws or something to be ashamed of. Asking for help takes courage and strength; and taking charge of your life will help you live well with PD.

Depression

Recognizing depression in PD is very important, it is the first step toward treatment and recovery. Some symptoms of PD and depression overlap -- sleep problems, feeling “slowed down” or having less emotion show on your face are seen in both PD and depression. You may not recognize that your mood has changed; therefore it is helpful when those closest to you report to your healthcare team any changes that might be related to depression.

People experience depression in different ways but there are symptoms that are commonly seen. These are persistent and affect how you are able to live your life.

- feeling sad, down or “blue”
- no longer finding pleasure in activities that used to bring you pleasure
- feeling restless or unsettled
- feeling worthless, helpless or guilty
- feeling tired all the time
- changes in sleep – too much, too little, or unable to stay asleep
- changes in appetite - eating more or less; weight gain or weight loss
- poor attention, inability to concentrate
- thoughts that life is not worth living
- feeling “slowed down”, everything taking more time to get done
- aches, pains (headaches, stomach aches) that are not responding to treatment

Anxiety

Anxiety is also very common in PD, making daily life a challenge. Depression and anxiety in PD are often seen together. Be sure to talk with your doctor or healthcare team if you are experiencing anxiety -- help is available!

Symptoms of anxiety include:

- feelings of excessive nervousness
- recurring thoughts of worry or fear
- avoiding social situations
- physical symptoms – racing heart, sweating, increase in tremor, “dizziness, trouble breathing

Getting Help

If you, or someone close to you, are experiencing symptoms of depression and/or anxiety, talk with your doctor and healthcare team. Recognizing and treating depression and anxiety early is important.

Treatment may include lifestyle changes, medication, counselling or therapy from a qualified practitioner. Support groups associated with Parkinson Association of Alberta can be of great help to you, your family and your support system.